

Message Text

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ORIGIN AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ONY-00 /011 R

DRAFTED BY AF/E:RFILLING:AB
APPROVED BY AF/E:JWHITING
AF/I:LGSHURTLEFF
DESIRED DISTRIBUTION
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R 201737Z JUN 77
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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 142617

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM

SUBJECT: DRAFT HUMAN RIGHTS PLAN FOR ETHIOPIA

REF; STATE 139160

1. DEPARTMENT WOULD APPRECIATE EMBASSY COMMENTS ON FOLLOW-
ING DRAFT COUNTRY PLAN BY JUNE 28. PLEASE SLUG FOR AF
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A. HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN ETHIOPIA, IMPERFECTLY OBSERVED
BY THE AUTOCRATIC REGIME OF EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE, HAS
PLUMMETED SINCE THE ASSUMPTION OF POWER BY THE ETHIOPIAN
PROVISIONAL MILITARY GOVERNMENT (EPMG) IN SEPTEMBER 1974.
THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IS CONDITIONED BY AN INSTITUTION-
SHATTERING REVOLUTION AND THE PROSECUTION OF A CIVIL WAR
AGAINST THE SECESSIONIST ERITREANS AS WELL AS AGAINST OTHER
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ARMED OPPONENTS.

1. RESPECT FOR THE INTEGRITY OF THE PERSON

ETHIOPIA IS REplete WITH VIOLATIONS OF RESPECT FOR THE
INTEGRITY OF THE PERSON, ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE PERSONS LINKED
WITH THE OLD ARISTOCRACY, THE HAILE SELASSIE REGIME, OR
SUSPECTED OF ENGAGING IN ANTI-REGIME ACTIVITIES. FOR
EXAMPLE, WIVES AND CHILDREN OF 64 HIGH-RANKING OFFICIALS
SUMMARILY EXECUTED IN 1975 BY THE REGIME REMAIN IN PRISON.

WHILE TORTURE HAS NOT BEEN FREQUENTLY MENTIONED AS A SERIOUS PROBLEM, THE COMMON USE OF ARBITRARY ARREST AND THE LENGTHY IMPRISONMENT OF OPPONENTS OF THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO BE GROWING. IN AN EFFORT TO CHECK GROWING OPPOSITION, AND PARTICULARLY TO DISARM URBAN TERRORIST GROUPS, THE EPMG ORGANIZED EARLY IN 1977 A WIDE-RANGING SEARCH AND SEIZURE PROGRAM. NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS (KEBELES) WERE ARMED AND AUTHORIZED TO CARRY OUT SEARCHES OF HOMES, VEHICLES AND PERSONS IN AN EFFORT TO LOCATE WEAPONS AND ANTI-GOVERNMENT LITERATURE. THIS ARBITRARY AND HAPHAZARDLY-MANAGED CAMPAIGN RESULTED IN THE DEATH OF SCORES OF PERSONS AND THE IMPRISONMENT OF UNTOLD NUMBERS. ESPECIALLY FLAGRANT WAS THE REPORTED EXECUTION WITHOUT TRIAL OF SEVERAL HUNDRED STUDENTS WHO ALLEGEDLY HAD EXPRESSED OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT.

UNDER THE ROBESPIERRE-LIKE LT. COL. MENGISTU (WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KILLING OF HIS TWO PREDECESSORS), THE EPMG RULES BY DECREE ON THE BASIS OF A ROUGH CONSENSUS PROVIDED BY MILITARY PERSONNEL ELECTED BY MILITARY UNITS. THE PARLIAMENT AND CONSTITUTION HAVE BEEN DISSOLVED AND NO ELECTIONS ARE EVEN CONTEMPLATED.

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THE ABSENCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES OR ELECTIONS FOR NATIONAL OFFICE, OF COURSE, SERIOUSLY CIRCUMSCRIBES THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE COUNTRY. ULTIMATE POWER IS VESTED IN THE PROVISIONAL MILITARY ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL (PMAC) OR DIRG, WHICH MAKES ALL MAJOR DECISIONS. AT THE PERSISTENT URGING OF THE SOVIETS AND THEIR ALLIES, ETHIOPIA IS EXPECTED SHORTLY TO FORM A COMMUNIST PARTY, PROBABLY ALONG THE LINES OF THE SOVIET MODEL.

2. RESPECT FOR CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES

FOR THE MASS OF THE POPULACE CERTAIN CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES PROBABLY HAVE BEEN EXPANDED UNDER ETHIOPIA'S REVOLUTION, MAINLY RIGHTS OF INDIVIDUALS TO PARTICIPATE IN RUDIMENTARY POLITICAL LIFE. THE FORMATION OF URBAN AND RURAL DWELLERS ASSOCIATIONS HAVE PROVIDED A VEHICLE -- AS YET UNTESTED -- FOR THE ETHIOPIAN MASSES TO HAVE A LIMITED INPUT INTO SOME OF THE POLITICAL DECISIONS HAVING A BEARING ON THEIR LIVES. THE MASS OF THE POPULACE HAD SCANT INFLUENCE ON ELECTIONS UNDER HAILE SELASSIE.

AS STATED ABOVE, THE RIGHTS OF THE OPPOSITION ARE NON-EXISTENT. FOREIGN TRAVEL AND MIGRATION HAVE ALL BUT BEEN HALTED EXCEPT FOR A LIMITED NUMBER OF TRUSTED OFFICIALS. A POLICY OF SERIOUSLY CIRCUMSCRIBING CONTACTS BETWEEN FOREIGN DIPLOMATS AND ETHIOPIANS WAS RECENTLY IMPLEMENTED FOLLOWING THE PATTERN TYPICAL IN COMMUNIST STATES. MOVE-

MENT WITHIN THE COUNTRY AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION SEEM SO FAR TO HAVE REMAINED UNAFFECTED BY THE REFORMING ZEAL OF THE REVOLUTION. LIKE PRIVATE FOREIGN TRAVEL, EMIGRATION HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY HALTED ALTHOUGH A NUMBER OF EXCEPTIONS ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS HAVE BEEN REPORTED.

3. GOVERNMENT ATTITUDE TOWARDS ECONOMIC HUMAN RIGHTS

ALTHOUGH THE REVOLUTIONARY TURMOIL HAS BLOCKED IN PART ITS
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REALIZATION, GOVERNMENT POLICY SEEMS GENUINELY AIMED AT RAISING THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LEVEL OF THE MASSES. CENTURIES OF FEUDALISM SEEM TO HAVE BEEN DEALT A FATAL BLOW. THE MOST SUCCESSFUL POLICY DEFINITELY HAS BEEN THE LAND REFORM WHICH HAS ENDED THE WIDESCALE OWNERSHIP OF LAND BY AN OPPRESSIVE ARISTOCRATIC CASTE -- MOST STRIKING IN THE AREAS INHABITED BY NON-AMHARIC PEOPLE, NOTABLY IN THE GALA-PEOPLED SOUTH-WEST. MORE FOOD NOW SEEMS TO BE CONSUMED OR RETAINED BY THE RURAL POPULACE THAN WAS THE CASE UNDER THE EMPEROR. THE PEASANT CLASS, WHICH MAKES UP THE BULK OF THE POPULATIONS, IS REPORTEDLY GENERALLY SATISFIED WITH THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL GAINS THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED UNDER THE REFORMS.

HEALTH CARE AT BEST IS RUDIMENTARY IN ETHIOPIA. THE SCHEDULED ARRIVAL OF OVER 100 CUBAN MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS SHOULD ADD DRAMATICALLY TO THE HEALTH DELIVERY CAPACITY OF A COUNTRY HAVING ONLY SLIGHTLY OVER 300 DOCTORS. THE EPMG IS COOPERATING WITH THE WHO IN ELIMINATING THE LAST VESTIGES OF SMALL-POX FROM ETHIOPIA; SOMALIA IS THE ONLY OTHER COUNTRY IN THE WORLD STILL TO HAVE REPORTED CASES. CORRUPTION HAS NOT BEEN REPORTED IN THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT. THE REVOLUTION IS STILL IN AN EARLY IDEALISTIC AND SOMEWHAT PURITANICAL PHASE. EXAMPLES OF PROFITEERING BY GRAIN MERCHANTS LAST YEAR WERE DEALT WITH BY SUMMARY EXECUTION.

4. GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

IN THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEW THE LEVEL OF MEANINGFUL HUMAN RIGHTS FOR THE ETHIOPIAN MASSES HAS IMPROVED MEASURABLY SINCE THE REVOLUTION. THE EPMG POINTS TO THE GAINS IN ECONOMIC WELL-BEING AND THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE
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BASIC DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, AREAS IN WHICH THE GOVERNMENT MUST BE CREDITED FOR ACHIEVING POSITIVE ADVANCES. ON THE OTHER HAND THE GOVERNMENT MUST BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF THOUSANDS OF NON-COMBATANTS DURING THE

EFFORT TO CRUSH VARIOUS OPPOSITION FORCES. IT MUST ALSO BE NOTED THAT THE OPPOSITION, NOTABLY THE URBAN/MARXIST ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (EPRP), IS GUILTY OF MOUNTING A VAST TERRORIST EFFORT TO TOPPLE THE EPMG. UNFORTUNATELY, AN EXAGGERATED DEGREE OF INTRANSIGENCE HAS CHARACTERIZED THE EPMG; THERE HAS BEEN NO WILLINGNESS TO SEEK A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT WITH ANY OF THE VARIOUS DISSIDENT AND INSURGENT GROUPS WHICH DOT THE COUNTRY. EVEN MAKING ALLOWANCES FOR THE FACT THAT THE INITIAL PHASES OF A MAJOR REVOLUTION MAY TEND TO BE BLOODY, THE TECHNIQUES OF THE DIRG EXHIBIT AN UNUSUAL EXCESS OF VIOLENCE.

5. OUTSIDE INVESTIGATIONS

THE EPMG HAS EVINced NO WILLINGNESS TO ALLOW INDEPENDENT, OUTSIDE INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS HAS BEEN DENIED ACCESS TO STRIFE-TORN ERITREA BUT OUTSIDERS HAVE BEEN PERMITTED TO VISIT PRISONS HOLDING ARISTOCRATS.

B. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. US OBJECTIVES

OUR HUMAN RIGHTS OBJECTIVE DURING THE NEXT TWELVE MONTHS IS TO GET THE EPMG TO TAKE NOTE OF HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS IN ETHIOPIA AND THEREBY ENCOURAGE IT TO MODULATE HARSH REVOLUTIONARY POLICIES AND ACTIONS. OUR FOUR MAJOR OBJECTIVES ARE:

-- AN END TO THE SECESSIONIST WAR WITH ERITREA WHICH HAS PRODUCED WIDE-SCALE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND CONTRIBUTED
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TO THE ATMOSPHERE OF CRISIS/VIOLENCE THROUGHOUT ETHIOPIA.

-- RELEASE FROM PRISON OF AT LEAST THOSE WHOSE ONLY CRIME IS A FAMILY RELATIONSHIP WITH OPPONENTS OF THE REGIME.

-- PROGRESS TOWARD THE EPMG'S ANNOUNCED GOAL OF A FUNDAMENTAL DEMOCRATIZATION AND RE-SHAPING OF ETHIOPIAN SOCIETY TO DISTRIBUTE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL BENEFITS MORE WIDELY.

-- A RETURN TO CIVILIAN COURTS AND TO JUDICIAL PROCEDURES WHICH PROVIDE GENUINE PROTECTION TO ACCUSED PERSONS.

-- THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CONDITIONS AND A REGIME WHICH WILL PERMIT A GENERAL ADHERENCE TO BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS.

OUR SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH ETHIOPIA IS BY NOW ONLY OF HISTORIC INTEREST. THE IMPORTANT ELEMENTS WHICH IN THE

PAST MAY HAVE GIVEN US SOME LEVERAGE WITH THE ETHIOPIANS (E.G. THE KAGNEW STATION AND ETHIOPIA'S DEPENDENCE ON US FOR MILITARY HARDWARE AND TRAINING) ARE GONE, VICTIMS OF A RAPID DETERIORATION IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. LEFT ONLY WITH AN AID PROGRAM OF MODERATE SIZE (WHICH SECURITY CONDITIONS MAY MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR US TO IMPLEMENT) AND A GREATLY REDUCED EMBASSY (WHICH HAS VIRTUALLY NO ACCESS TO POLICYMAKERS), IT IS DIFFICULT TO VISUALIZE HOW WE CAN BRING MEANINGFUL PRESSURE ON THE EPMG THROUGH OUR BILATERAL PROGRAMS.

POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

A. WHILE THE EPMG CLEARLY WISHES US TO CONTINUE BILATERAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT ANY EFFORT
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TO MAKE IMPROVEMENTS IN THIS HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES A QUID PRO QUO FOR AID WOULD RESULT IN THE PROGRAM'S RAPID TERMINATION.

B. THE EPMG IS MOST SENSITIVE TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE US MIGHT USE ITS INFLUENCE CONTRARY TO ETHIOPIAN INTERESTS IN INTERNATIONAL LENDING INSTITUTIONS SUCH AS THE IBRD. ON MAY 10 WE ABSTAINED ON TWO IDA LOANS AND DELIVERED A STRONG HUMAN RIGHTS STATEMENT. ETHIOPIA WOULD BE LOATH TO LOSE ITS SIGNIFICANT AID FROM THE WORLD BANK AND MIGHT ALSO FEAR THAT A SLOWDOWN IN WORLD BANK PROGRAMS COULD ALSO HAVE A DOMINO EFFECT ON THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS. IN USING THE INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS WE RUN THE RISK OF BEING ACCUSED OF DRAGGING POLITICS INTO AN AREA WHERE MANY OF OUR FRIENDS BELIEVE IT HAS NO PLACE.

C. THE ETHIOPIAN ECONOMY IS MOST VULNERABLE ON COFFEE, AND ANY EFFORT TO LOWER THE PURCHASES OF ETHIOPIA COFFEE WOULD BE A CRITICAL BLOW TO THE ECONOMY. THE EPMG REPORTEDLY BELIEVES THAT WE HAVE THE POWER TO DISCOURAGE OUR FRIENDS IN EUROPE FROM IMPORTING ETHIOPIAN COFFEE AT THE CURRENT HIGH LEVELS. WHILE WE ARE THE LARGEST SINGLE IMPORTER OF ETHIOPIAN COFFEE, CURRENT LEGISLATION WOULD NOT PERMIT US TO USE THAT POTENTIAL WEAPON.

D. WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO SPEAK OUT FORCEFULLY ON MAJOR INCIDENTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AS THEY MIGHT OCCUR IN ETHIOPIA. FOR SUCH STATEMENTS TO HAVE ANY POSITIVE EFFECT ON ETHIOPIAN HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES, THEY MUST BE BALANCED AND CONTAIN SOME RECOGNITION OF THE FACT THAT ETHIOPIA HAS MADE PROGRESS IN HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOME AREAS AND ALSO THAT THE EPMG IS COPING WITH LARGE AMOUNTS OF TERRORISTIC OPPOSITION.

THROUGHOUT WE SHOULD INCREASE OUR QUIET DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS,
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IDEALLY FOREWARNING THE EPMG WHEN WE ARE PLANNING TO MAKE
A NEW STATEMENT ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA.
IF FUTURE STATEMENTS CAN BE MORE BALANCED AS SUGGESTED
ABOVE, THE CHANCES OF OUR EFFORTS BEING RECEIVED WITH
ANYTHING OTHER THAN TOTAL OUTRAGE MAY BE HEIGHTENED.

2. EXPECTED REACTIONS

THE EPMG HAS REACTED WITH ANNOYANCE AND HURT ON TWO
OCCASIONS WHEN WE PUBLICLY ATTACKED THEIR RECORD ON HUMAN
RIGHTS: SECRETARY VANCE'S ANNOUNCEMENT ON FEBRUARY 24
THAT WE WOULD GIVE NO FUTURE GRANT MILITARY MATERIAL
ASSISTANCE TO ETHIOPIA; AND AT OUR ABSTENTION ON TWO IDA
LOANS FOR ETHIOPIA ON MAY 10. THEY WERE PARTICULARLY
ANGERED THAT WE GAVE NO CREDIT TO THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
ADVANCES UNDER THE REVOLUTION OR TO THE FACT THAT THE
GOVERNMENT IS UNDER CONSTANT ATTACK FROM TERRORISTS. THERE
HAS BEEN NO IDENTIFIABLE PRAISE FOR OUR HUMAN RIGHTS
POLICY FROM ANY SEGMENT OF ETHIOPIA OFFICIALDOM. MANY
ETHIOPIAN PRIVATE CITIZENS, INCLUDING MOST REFUGEES,
HOWEVER, WERE DELIGHTED OVER OUR DECISION TO CUT MAP TO
ETHIOPIA. THE HUMAN RIGHTS GROUNDS WERE PROBABLY NOT A
FACTOR IN THEIR SATISFACTION, HOWEVER. VANCE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 22-Sep-1999 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, HUMAN RIGHTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 20-Jun-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977STATE142617
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: AF/E:RFILLING:AB
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 GDS
Errors: n/a
Expiration:
Film Number: D770219-1167
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t197706110/baaaetax.tel
Line Count: 306
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 0c1e9e73-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2012878
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DRAFT HUMAN RIGHTS PLAN FOR ETHIOPIA
TAGS: SHUM, ET
To: ADDIS ABABA
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/0c1e9e73-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009